

The Foreign Policy Issue of THIS Year

Earlier this year it seemed that the 1964 presidential election might turn mainly on U.S. foreign policy, especially since Johnson had brought so little experience to that side of his job. And with a frustrating hot war in Vietnam, with Castro still in power, with our alliances changing shape and the Cold War changing content, foreign issues do indeed give Americans plenty to think and worry about. But the campaign so far has shed little light on them. The Johnson strategy is to label Goldwater a trigger-happy warmonger. The Goldwater strategy is to label Johnson's "a crisis-of-the-week" foreign policy that lets Communism spread and freedom go down the drain. Both strategies obscure the facts of our situation and the real options open to us abroad.

How much trouble are we actually in? Let's take 1952 as a bench mark. In that year we also had a hot war, a cold war and alliance problems on our hands. Eisenhower was elected, the first Republican in a generation, in good part because the Korean war was stalemated and Communism was still a growing and misunderstood menace.

The main roadblock to Communism then, as now, was U.S. power and purpose. These had already been sufficiently mustered to keep Greece and Turkey alive with the Truman Doctrine and to rearm Europe with NATO. Eisenhower and Dulles hardened this "containment" policy with a global network of commitments and the innovation of stable, long-pull preparedness. These have not been fundamentally altered since. We have remained more than a military match for Communism, and every showdown that tested this—in the Formosa Strait, in Berlin, and more recently in Cuba—has forced a Communist retreat.

Had we sought more showdowns, as Barry Goldwater implies that he would have, there might well have been more Communist retreats. But our moderation in the show of force has also borne its fruit. Some of Khrushchev's main setbacks—the Sino-Soviet split, his chronic farm failure—are not our doing. And we are far from having "won" the Cold War. But, although Goldwater tries to make it sound the same, it is not the same Cold War we faced in '52. It is more complex and less dangerous.

One big change in it, too easily forgotten, took place in Ike's administration. He and Dulles contested and deflated Khrushchev's most potent propaganda weapon: the phony Communist patent on the word "peace." Nuclear weapons made this the most important political word in the world to millions of people. To rescue it from its Communist captivity was a considerable achievement. Eisenhower and Dulles did it by probing for areas of partial agreement with Communism and by imaginative plans on disarmament, such as open-skies inspection. They kept the peace not only through arms and the willingness to use them,

but through negotiation, patience and the willingness to talk.

So have Kennedy and Johnson. Twelve years of experience have now nurtured an American Cold War policy of strength plus negotiation that must be called, in the main, both bipartisan and successful. Since the Cuba showdown, this policy has led to a partial détente with Moscow. Johnson's experts do not pretend to know whether this détente is "a watershed in human history"—leading gradually out of the Cold War—or "a parenthesis between two Communist offensives." In any case the U.S. is ready for either eventuality—a lot readier, it would seem, than the Communists. When Dean Rusk says he would rather have his problems than Khrushchev's, he's right.

Rusk's problems are nevertheless grave enough, and some of them rightly get involved in the current campaign. The Vietnam crisis has not been helped by Johnson's attempts to keep it on ice until after election. Yet Goldwater's swipes at the Vietnam issue have not included a rational alternative to the Administration policy. On Cuba, Goldwater does have coherent and specific policy proposals, including the recognition of a Cuban government-in-exile plus air and matériel support for any invasion it might launch against Castro. However, the increasing diplomatic isolation of Castro has made this risk seem less worth taking. On NATO, which has deteriorated through a combination of De Gaulle, détente and U.S. neglect, Goldwater's insistence that it be rebuilt makes general good sense.

On several specific problems, such as Panama, Germany, Brazil and Chile, Johnson's foreign policy has been lucky or skillful enough to remove them from the political target zone. Meanwhile Goldwater, instead of concentrating on vulnerable points, or advocating fresh programs that could attract knowledgeable support, has resorted to wholesale and inaccurate vituperation. His wild words for Johnson's foreign policy are "decay and ruin . . . disaster and oblivion." This line of attack renders the whole issue unrecognizable to responsible voters.

Goldwater has had a good command of the logic of peace through strength and the folly of appeasement, a logic in which some Democrats have often needed a lesson. But his opponent now is Johnson, who needs no such lesson, and the year is 1964, not 1952. To rant at Johnson as though he were an appeaser, or as though America still needed a Paul Revere on Communism, is to be anachronistic. Moreover, if Goldwater can squint so skeptically toward the Sino-Soviet split, which is one of the great political realities of this era, he would surely prove blind to subtler opportunities to weaken Communism by diplomacy. Whence then would come his "victory"?

The Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policy which Goldwater professes to admire was not just "brinkmanship"; it involved a good deal of patience and even of the summitry he has no stomach for. When Khrushchev came here as Eisenhower's guest in '59, the obvious risks in the gesture drew the same apprehensions of appeasement that Goldwater now expresses about détente. Said Vice President Nixon then: "The Communists are not so smart and we are not so dumb" that we need fear contact with them.

Still less need we fear it today when their relative power and menace have not grown but receded. The real foreign policy issue before us is how best to use this pause—or new phase—in the Cold War.

Johnson himself has shown no particular style or dash in foreign affairs, and has none of Kennedy's appetite for the details of policy. Johnson has not yet offered any very invigorating or inspiring vision of the American role in the world. But he has shown prudence and competence and his general picture of the world seems much closer to current reality than Goldwater's, which is out of date and streaked with Walter Mitty oversimplifications. There are a number of issues in this election. Foreign policy, which earlier might have seemed a Johnson weak point, has turned out to be one of his principal strengths.